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and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt

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René Descartes REGULÆ AD DIRECTIONEM INGENII

RULES FOR THE DIRECTION OF THE NATURAL INTELLIGENCE

A bilingual edition of the Cartesian treatise on method

Edited and translated by George Heffernan

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Meiner lieben Frau,
Kim Young-Hee,
in Verehrung und Dankbarkeit gewidmet:

'O felix hominum genus,
si vestros animos amor,
quo caelum regitur, regat.'

Boethius, *Consolatio philosophiae*, bk. II, c. 8, ll. 28–30

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PREFACE

Four hundred years after the birth of René Descartes, the present volume now makes available, for the first time in a bilingual, philosophical edition prepared especially for English-speaking readers, his *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii / Rules for the Direction of the Natural Intelligence*, the Cartesian treatise on method. This unique edition contains an improved version of the original Latin text, a new English translation intended to be as literal as possible and as liberal as necessary, an interpretive essay contextualizing the text historically, philologically, and philosophically, a comprehensive index of Latin terms, a key glossary of English equivalents, and an extensive bibliography covering all aspects of Descartes' methodology. For one cannot understand Descartes without understanding the early Descartes; one cannot understand the early Descartes without understanding the *Regulæ*; and one cannot understand the *Regulæ* without understanding a philosophical edition thereof. Hence this project.

This is the third in my series of bilingual editions of the major works of Descartes. The *Meditationes de prima philosophia / Meditations on First Philosophy* (1990) was merely exploratory. The *Discours de la méthode / Discourse on the Method* (1994) showed how very little effort is required to misunderstand this seemingly facile work. The *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii / Rules for the Direction of the Natural Intelligence* should make it clear that there is no seamless transition between the early and the mature Descartes. Thus these editions have also been done, not by accident, but by intention, in reverse chronological order. The motivation for doing them was not a drive to do research on Descartes for its own sake, but rather a growing skepticism in regard to certain currently fashionable self-styled 'postmodernist' interpretations both of 'modernity' in general as a menacing monolith and of Descartes in particular as a rationalist extremist. But my thoughts on these topics I shall largely reserve for future forays.

With gratitude I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the following individuals and institutions in the preparation of the present volume.

The Department of Philosophy of the University of Bonn welcomed me as Visiting Researcher during the summer semesters of 1994 and 1995. The Department of Philosophy of Boston College bestowed the status of Visiting Scholar on me for the academic years 1993–1994 and 1994–1995, and Richard Cobb-Stevens has been especially helpful in seeing to it that I continue to enjoy the use of all the excellent scholarly facilities of his institution. The 'Geist der Gründlichkeit' exhibited by Hubertus Busche (University of Bonn) has been a source of constant admiration and inspiration. My former professors at the Catholic University of America – especially Robert Sokolowski, Thomas Prufer, and Dominic O'Meara – taught me, among other things, that it is foolish to think that one can philosophize effectively without trying one's best to understand difficult texts. Lisa Marie Esposito-Buckley filled in a few gaps in my knowledge of the fragments of the ancient Stoics. Bill Falcetano consistently shows that one is a philosopher, not because of whom one knows, but because of what one knows. Daniel Garber (University of Chicago) displayed immediate, informed enthusiasm for the project upon learning of it. Klaus Kaehler (University of Cologne), J. N. Mohanty (Temple

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University), and Thomas Flynn (Emory University) have been supportive of my work in other areas, which in turn has made it much easier for me to bring this project to temporary closure. Richard Kennington (Catholic University of America) first awakened my interest in Descartes and in the *Regulæ*. These interests were then further developed in long-term stimulating conversations with Pamela Kraus (St. John's College, Annapolis). Arthur Ledoux and John Warren, chairpersons of the Department of Philosophy of Merrimack College during the time of this undertaking, did whatever they could to make it easier for me to do research despite a very demanding teaching load. Dieter Lohmar (University of Cologne) has long been a friend with whom I could enjoy doing philosophy. Ram Adhar Mall (University of Bremen) has made clear to me some very important intercultural aspects of philosophy. Colleagues of Merrimack College continue to support my scholarship with a steady flow of faculty development grants. Nicholas Rescher (University of Pittsburgh) offered moral support for the project in the form of kind words of encouragement. Robert Scharff (University of New Hampshire) did so too. My continuing indebtedness to Gerhart Schmidt (University of Bonn) – especially in regard to *res Cartesianae* – is yet again gladly reaffirmed.

All my dedications have been meant benevolently, but this holds especially for that of the present volume, which is dedicated to my loyal wife, Young-Hee Kim, as an – inadequate – expression of appreciation for all that she has done over the years to bring and to hold us together:

swem nie von liebe leit geschach,
dem geschach ouch liep von liebe nie.
liep unde leit diu wâren ie
*an minnen ungeschieden.**

Andover–Bad Godesberg
June 1, 1994–December 31, 1995

George Heffernan

* Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, ll. 204–207.

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INTRODUCTION

A CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE TEXT

'He [Descartes] has not published his method,
but rather, as he himself remarks,
he only intended to write about it and to give examples of it.
Therefore those who are too satisfied with what he has published
and who think that they possess his method
are greatly mistaken.' [1]

– Leibniz –

A Brief Protreptic: The Rationale for this Edition

As is well known, René Descartes did not publish his most elaborate set of reflections on method, namely, the *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii / Rules for the Direction of the Natural Intelligence*. Thus the present edition is justified first and foremost by the fact that it is – four hundred years after the birth of its author – the first bilingual Latin-English edition of that work ever to be published. Moreover, although there are English editions and translations of the *Regulæ* accessible in the same volumes with other works of Descartes, there is not now available even any other edition or translation of this work in the form of an independent publication in English.[2] Finally, whereas the 'usual' works of Descartes, namely, the *Discourse on the Method* and the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, have traditionally provided the starting-points for an understanding of his philosophy, it is hard to discern how the lack of a readily accessible and separately available English edition or translation of the *Regulæ* – which are, after all, sui generis – can be exerting any positive force on the development of Cartesian studies. This edition intends to fill this lacuna.

Indeed, the aforementioned preference, according to which there is no real proportionality in the level of attention focused on the *Discourse* and on the *Meditations*, on the one hand, compared with the *Regulæ*,[3] on the other hand, is nothing but a prejudice for which there is hardly any philosophical justification. For it is generally safe to say that those who one-sidedly orient themselves on the *Meditations* in their study of

[1] See G. W. Leibniz, *Notata quaedam … circa vitam et doctrinam Cartesii*, *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* (7 vols.), ed. C. I. Gerhardt (Berlin, 1875–1890), vol. IV (1880), p. 310: '… ipse in scriptis suis non exposuit, quemadmodum nec publicavit methodum suam, sed tantum de ea scribere eiusque specimina dare voluit, ut ipse observat. Itaque valde falluntur, qui his quae edidit, nimis contenti sunt, methodumque eius se habere arbitrantur.'

[2] Even the standard one-volume edition of Descartes' works does not contain the complete text of the *Regulæ*. See John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (trans.), *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge, 1988). Only Rules I–XIII are given on pp. 1–19.

[3] Or compared with the *Principles of Philosophy* – but that is another matter altogether.

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Descartes' philosophy tend to get the impression that he is almost exclusively interested in metaphysical questions such as the existence of God and the real distinction between the human soul and the body – even though, the better one knows this work, the more one can appreciate that this too is a highly selective interpretation of it. Moreover, as far as the *Discourse* is concerned, the hardest thing to do while reading it is to keep telling oneself, again and again and again, that it really is mainly and mostly about method – the irony being that it is actually the *Regulæ* which constitute Descartes' authentic treatise on method.

As a matter of fact, to look for *the Cartesian method* mainly and mostly in 'the principal rules of the method' that are proposed in the *Discourse on the Method* is a fundamentally misguided enterprise.[4] For Descartes' own contemporaneous correspondence unambiguously indicates that the *Discourse* was hardly intended to represent an exhaustive – or even a systematic – presentation of his method.[5] On the contrary, a repeatedly recurring message of the letters is that the purpose of the *Discourse on the Method* is to reveal just enough of the method to render the *Essays of the Method* accessible.[6] In other words, it had simply never been the main aim of the *Discourse on the Method* to explain adequately the method per se.[7]

After all, the *Discourse* has the narrative character of a linked series of reports on research done, research being done, and research to be done. But, of the research done, only some was being published, whereas some was not, and some could not be. For, on the one hand, the *Dioptrics*, the *Meteorology*, and the *Geometry* are examples of research that Descartes was publishing (1637), and he wrote the *Discourse* as 'a preface' [8] to accompany them, to explain some aspects of their methodology, and to facilitate their acceptance. And, on the other hand, *The World*, on which Descartes had worked from 1630 to 1632, which he had abandoned in 1633, and on which he reports in the fifth part of the *Discourse*, was not being published because it was deemed unpublishable – due to

[4] Still, few readers seem to notice that, according to the preface of the work, the best that one can hope to find there is 'les principales règles de la méthode'. See René Descartes, *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris, 1964–1976), vol. VI, p. 1. Hereafter the works of Descartes are usually referred to by 'AT', volume, and page.

[5] See, e.g., the Interpretive Essay of my recent edition of the *Discourse*, namely, *René Descartes: Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences / Discourse on the Method of Conducting One's Reason Well and of Seeking the Truth in the Sciences, A Bilingual Edition and an Interpretation of René Descartes' Philosophy of Method* (Notre Dame/London, 1994), p. 153 ff.

[6] Some key letter commentaries on the *Discourse* are: (1) Letter to Huygens, Nov. 1, 1635, (2) To Mersenne, Mar., 1636, (3) To Mersenne, Feb. 27, 1637 (?), (4) To Mersenne, May (end), 1637, (5) To Unknown, May (end), 1637, and (6) To Vatier, Feb. 22, 1638. See AT, I, 591–592, 338–341, 348–351, 366–368, 369–370, and 558–565, respectively. The best edition of the correspondence of Descartes in English is: John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. III: *The Correspondence* (Cambridge, 1991). This edition also contains a handy list of pertinent references to the *Discourse* (p. 391).

[7] See, e.g., Letter to Mersenne, Feb. 27, 1637 (?) (AT, I, 349): 'But I have not been able to understand very well your objection concerning the title; for I do not put *Treatise on the Method* [*Traité de la Méthode*], but rather *Discourse on the Method* [*Discours de la Méthode*], which is the same thing as *Preface or Notice concerning the Method* [*Préface ou Avis touchant la Méthode*], in order to show that I do not intend to teach the method, but rather only to discuss it.'

[8] See Letter to Huygens, Nov. 1, 1635 (AT, I, 592): '… une préface …'. Moreover, To Mersenne, Feb. 27, 1637 (?) (ibid., p. 349): '… *Préface … touchant la Méthode* …'. Finally, To Unknown, May (end), 1637 (ibid., p. 369): '… discours qui sert de préface …'.

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his defense of Copernicanism, his awareness of the case of Galileo, and his concomitant fear of inquisitorial condemnation.[9] Finally – and here crucially –, the second part of the *Discourse* reports on some of the work on the 'méditations méthodologiques' that would survive in the form of a treatise on method now known as the *Regulæ*, while the fourth part reports on some of the labor on the 'méditations métaphysiques' that would endure in the form of a treatise on metaphysics now celebrated as the *Meditations*.[10]

Therefore the *Discourse* virtually disqualifies itself from being the definitive account of the method of Descartes by pointing straight to another major work as the methodological treatise on which he had been working in 1619 and in the following years.[11] And this magnum opus can be none other than the *Rules for the Direction of the Natural Intelligence*. Still, this is not yet to say anything about the substantial overlapping and underlapping between the rules of the *Discourse* and those of the *Regulæ*.

For philosophical purposes, then, the present edition is very easy to justify: If one wants to understand Descartes, then one must understand the early Descartes; if one wants to understand the early Descartes, then one must understand the *Regulæ*; and, if one wants to understand the *Regulæ*, then one must understand a philosophical edition thereof.

History: The 'Regulæ' in Descartes' Early Years (1618–1629)

Now, although the devil dwells in the details, the early intellectual development – that is, from 1618 to 1629 – of Descartes (1596–1650) may be divided, proceeding carefully from, inter alia, the autobiographical remarks in the *Discourse on the Method*, into three definite phases.[12] For, while this account is admittedly sketchy, it is also remarkably accurate.[13]

[9] Cf., e.g., the reference in *DM*, part V, § 2, to 'a treatise that certain considerations prevented [Descartes] from publishing' (AT, VI, 41), as well as VI, § 1, passim (AT, VI, 60 ff.). Some key letters of Descartes on the case of the Inquisition vs. Galileo are: To Mersenne, Nov. (end), 1633 (AT, I, 270–272), Feb. (ibid., pp. 281–282), Apr. (ibid., pp. 285–288), and Aug. 14, 1634 (ibid., pp. 303–306).

[10] Here I wish to correct an error on p. 119 of my edition of the *Discourse*. For there I relate the reference to the 'méditations … métaphysiques' (AT, VI, 31) at the beginning of part IV of the *Discourse* directly back to the reflections on logic, on mathematics, and on method on which Descartes reports both in all of part II and at the end of part III – and which were performed in 1619 and in the following years. But, as I myself later point out more than once (p. 128, fn. 83, and p. 164, fn. 305), the 'metaphysical meditations' of part IV of the *Discourse* date, not from 1619, but from 1629. This point is plainly relevant to the retrieval of the place of the *Regulæ* in Descartes' development as sketched in the autobiographical remarks of the *Discourse*. Of which see more below.

[11] In fact, by publication time Descartes thought of himself as having worked for 'twenty years' on the methodological issues of the *Discourse* and of the *Essays*. Cf. *DM*, VI, § 10 (AT, VI, 76), and Letter to Mersenne, Jun. 29, 1638 (AT, II, 191–192).

[12] Of course, this does not include his college and university education at La Flèche and at Poitiers, respectively, a highly selective account of which is given in the first part of the *Discourse*.

[13] Stephen Gaukroger says that 'the *Discours* is not especially reliable as an account of the precise details of Descartes' development'. See *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford, 1995), p. 106. That may be, but the numerous statements about dates – e.g., in part II, §§ 1 and 13, III, 6–7, IV, 1 ff., and VI, 1 and 8, etc. – do check out. In other words, the problem is not reliability, but generality.

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The first stage, which begins in the autumn of 1618 with a kind of personal renaissance inspired at least in part by Isaac Beeckman[14] in Holland and which ends in the autumn of 1619 with the meditations of the stove-heated room in Germany,[15] reaches its climax with Descartes' resolution to dedicate his life to scientific research and with his accompanying conception of a *mathesis universalis*, that is, a universal 'mathematics' or 'learning' arising from the extension of certain basic features of mathematical methodology to as many disciplines as possible.[16] For at the beginning of the second part[17] of the *Discourse* Descartes says that '[he] was then in Germany',[18] where, after having attended the coronation of Ferdinand II as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in Frankfurt am Main in the late summer of 1619,[19] he was detained by the beginning of the winter of 1619–1620 in quarters most probably located near a place already renowned as a center of mathematical learning, namely, the imperial city of Ulm on the Danube River,[20] and at the end of that part[21] he says that '[he] was then twenty-three [years old]'.[22]

The second stage, a long period of conversation, observation, and reflection which begins shortly after the winter of 1619–1620[23] and which ends in the autumn of 1628 with a resolute rejection of the social distractions of Paris in favor of the hidden life in Holland,[24] is especially characterized by Descartes' cultivation of the new method as well as by his application of it to mathematical and physical problems. For toward the end of the third part[25] of the *Discourse* Descartes thus describes some of his more significant intellectual activities 'in all the nine years following'[26] the reflections in the stove-heated room in Germany at the turn of the year from 1619 to 1620: 'And … I continued to train myself in the method that I had prescribed to myself. For, besides taking care generally to conduct all my thoughts according to its rules, I reserved for myself from time to time some hours that I spent particularly in practicing it in problems of mathematics, or even in some other problems, too, which I was able to render, as it were, similar to those of mathematics by detaching them from all the principles of the other sciences … .'[27] This narrative is also internally confirmed by the fact that at the very end of the same part[28] the reference to 'these [same] nine years' is repeated.[29]

[14] Of whom see more below. [15] On Descartes' celebrated 'poêle' see *Discourse*, AT, VI, 11 and 28.
[16] See ibid., pp. 17–22 (*Discourse*, pt. II, §§ 6–13).
[17] See the opening lines of § 1. [18] See AT, VI, 11.
[19] See ibid. The coronation in question is, more precisely, that of Ferdinand, King of Bohemia from June 29, 1617, to August 22, 1619, as Emperor Ferdinand II on August 28, 1619. The official festivities of the occasion lasted from July 20 to September 9, 1619.
[20] He would serve the Catholic Duke Maximilian I of Bavaria (1573–1651), an imperial ally.
[21] See the closing lines of § 13. [22] See AT, VI, 22.
[23] See ibid., p. 28: '… the winter had not been over for very long when …'.
[24] Of course, there are many things about the itinerary of the early Descartes that we shall probably never know with certainty. E.g., when *exactly* did Descartes *finally* relocate from France to Holland – in late 1628 or in early 1629? One can only begin by seeing the Letter to Mersenne, Oct. 8, 1629 (AT, I, 24), and the following correspondence.
[25] See § 6, passim. [26] See AT, VI, 28. [27] See ibid., p. 29.
[28] See the opening lines of § 7.
[29] See AT, VI, 30. There is also independent contemporaneous corroboration of many of the details of Descartes' development as he sets them down in the *Discourse*. E.g., Beeckman also records that, when Descartes visited him in Dordrecht on October 8, 1628, he informed him that he was 'done

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According to this temporal sequence, therefore, 'these … years' are from 1619 to 1628.[30]

The third stage, a short period which begins with a turn away from specifically methodological issues sometime during the later part of 1628[31] and which ends with constantly shifting focuses of interest sometime during the latter part of 1629,[32] is devoted almost entirely to Descartes' attempt to formulate the foundations of his 'classic' metaphysics in a little treatise, now lost, on the existence of God and on the immortality of the human soul – twin labyrinthine threads running from the 'Treatise on Metaphysics' via the *Discourse on the Method* to the *Meditations on First Philosophy*.[33] For at the beginning of the fourth part[34] of the *Discourse* Descartes wonders whether he should report to the reader on 'the first meditations that [he] did there [in Holland]'[35] – because he is afraid that these reflections are 'so metaphysical and so uncommon that perhaps they will not be to the taste of everyone',[36] while it is now known from other sources that

with arithmetic and with geometry' because in these disciplines he had grasped as much as possible for the human mind – 'in the last nine years' or from 1619 to 1628 ('his novem annis') (AT, X, 331).

30 As far as one can tell, Descartes was writing the final draft of the *Discourse* from the fall of 1635 to the spring of 1636, and he could have reckoned that it was going to be published in the (late) spring of 1637. Cf. *DM*, VI, §§ 1 and 8 (AT, VI, 60 and 74), Letter to Huygens, Nov. 1, 1635, and To Mersenne, Mar., 1636. Thus, too, his claim that 'it is exactly eight years ago' that he retired to Holland – also in *DM*, III, § 7 (AT, VI, 31) –, i.e., in the winter of 1628–1629, is verifiable.

31 Cf. once again the phenomenon of 'aversion' that Beeckman registers in his remarks on Descartes' intellectual development in the fall of 1628 (AT, X, 331): 'Is [Descartes] dicebat mihi se in arithmeticis et geometricis nihil amplius optare: id est, se tantum in iis … profecisse, quantum humanum ingenium capere possit.'

32 See Letter to Mersenne, Apr. 15, 1630 (AT, I, 137–138): 'And, if you find it strange that I have not continued some other treatises that I began while I was in Paris, I will tell you the reason for this. It is that, while I was working on them, I acquired a little more knowledge than I had had when I began them, and, when I tried to accommodate this, I was forced to start a new project [un nouveau projet], a little larger than the first. Thus it is as if someone had begun to build a house and then acquired unexpected riches and so changed his status that the building that he had begun was now too small for him. One would not blame him if one saw him starting to build another house more fitting to his fortune.'

33 Cf. Letter to Mersenne, Nov. 25, 1630 (AT, I, 182): '… perhaps I may someday complete a little Treatise on Metaphysics [un petit Traité de Métaphysique], which I began when I was in Friesland [Holland], in which I set out principally to prove *the existence of God and of our souls* when they are separate from the body, from which their immortality follows.' Of which see more below.

34 See the opening lines of § 1.

35 See AT, VI, 31.

36 Once again, since the beginning of the fourth part of the *Discourse* picks up immediately on the end, not of the second part, but rather of the third, the reflections back to which Descartes is directly referring here are surely not those started in Germany in 1619, but rather those performed in Holland in 1629. The decisive passage for distinguishing between the two sets of reflections is found toward the beginning of *DM*, III, § 6. For there Descartes explicitly mentions 'the stove-heated room where [he] had had all these thoughts' (AT, VI, 28), adding that 'the winter had not been over for very long when [he] set out to travel' (ibid.). Here 'all these thoughts' could only be those that he had had in 'the stove-heated room' in 'the winter' of 1619–1620 in Germany. On the other hand, 'the first meditations' on which the fourth part focuses are a different case of cogitations altogether, namely, those which Descartes thought through in Holland in 1629. In any case, since the last sentence of part three describes Descartes' emigration to Holland, the 'there' ('y') of the first sentence of part four must refer to this country – where he went to live at the end of 1628 or at the beginning of 1629 –, not to France and not at all to Germany.

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the full fate of his 'little treatise on metaphysics' is virtually undecidable.[37] What is established, however, is that 'during the first nine months in which [he] was in [Holland Descartes] did not work on anything else' but on the Latin treatise that was intended to contain his 'metaphysical meditations'.[38]

Thus the chronological clues provided by the *Discourse on the Method* enable the *Regulæ* to emerge as the key text of the early Descartes. For there happens to be a coincidence between the fact that there is a block of time in his intellectual development between the end of 1619 and the end of 1628, on the one hand, and the fact that he appears to have begun the work on the rules of the method in Germany from 1619 to 1620 and to have continued it in France – and perhaps in Holland – from 1626 to 1628, on the other hand.[39] Of course, for reasons that are not entirely evident, Descartes never did complete the task. For the work breaks off toward the end of the second part, and only twenty-one of the projected thirty-six rules are given – apparently, there were to have been three parts consisting of twelve rules each.[40] It is a classic case of parts in search of a whole.

Still, one should not make haste past the question of the dating of the *Regulæ*. For there have been two rather contrary patterns of thought on this issue, namely, the older, more straightforward way, and a newer, more discriminating approach. On the one hand, for example, Millet – grasping the text as basically a unit – has proposed that the winter of 1628–1629, thus when Descartes was leaving France to settle in the Netherlands, was the time at which the *Regulæ* were first drafted.[41] On the other hand, for example, Weber – apprehending the text as fundamentally a fragment – has argued that Descartes was almost continuously, but, of course, intermittently, composing the *Regulæ* from October, 1619, to October, 1628, with at least some work being done virtually every year.[42] Now the scholarly consensus appears to be that, while Millet's posi-

[37] On 'the little treatise on metaphysics' see Letter to Gibieuf, Jul. 18, 1629 (AT, I, 17), and Letters to Mersenne, Dec. 18, 1629 (ibid., pp. 83–95), Apr. 15 and Nov. 25, 1630 (ibid., pp. 135–147 and 178–182), and Feb. 27, 1637 (ibid., pp. 348–351).

[38] See, first, Letter to Gibieuf, Jul. 18, 1629 (AT, I, 17): '… a little treatise that I am starting …'. And, To Mersenne, Dec. 18, 1629 (ibid., p. 85): '… the little treatise that I have in hand …'. Then, To Mersenne, Apr. 15, 1630 (ibid., p. 144): 'Les neuf premiers mois [i.e., months at the beginning of 1629 and maybe even already at the end of 1628] que j'ai été en ce pays [Holland], je n'ai travaillé à autre chose … .' Next, To Mersenne, Nov. 25, 1630 (ibid., p. 182): '… a little Treatise on Metaphysics, which I began when I was in Friesland …'. Finally, To Mersenne, Feb. 27, 1637 (ibid., p. 350): 'About eight years [environ huit ans] ago … I wrote in Latin [en latin] the beginnings of a treatise on metaphysics [un commencement de métaphysique] … .'

[39] In the Interpretive Essay to the bilingual edition I specify 'from 1619–1620 to 1628–1629' (pp. 122 and 127) as 'the nine years' mentioned in the *Discourse* (III, §§ 6–7). The reason is that I am counting from the one turn of the year to the other, there being nine years starting at the turn of 1619 into 1620 and stopping at the turn of 1628 into 1629. Either one can understand Descartes also to be counting in this way or one must suppose that a mathematician of his caliber does not know how to count even to ten – or that his memory is selective or faulty.

[40] See Adrien Baillet, *La Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes* (Paris, 1691), vol. II, pp. 404–406, and Baillet, *Vie de Monsieur Descartes* (Abridgment) (Paris, 1692/1946), pp. 262–263.

[41] Cf. Joseph Millet, *Descartes – Sa vie, ses travaux, ses découvertes avant 1637* (Paris, 1867), pp. 154–162.

[42] Cf. Jean-Paul Weber, *La constitution du texte des 'Regulæ'* (Paris, 1964), passim, especially pp. 195–206. In addition, the essentials of the same account are not only available, but also much more accessible, in: Jean-Paul Weber, 'Sur la composition de la Regula IV de Descartes', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, vol. 154 (1964), pp. 1–20.

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tion is falsifiable in general, Weber's account is not verifiable in all its particulars.[43]

But cannot the *Discourse* also be interpreted in such a way as to help to determine more accurately the date of the *Regulæ*? For, in addition to the circumstantial evidence concerning the timing of the *Regulæ* that has already been presented, the *Discourse* contains what may be apprehended as an oblique reference to the main work that would have been in progress in the previous decade. At one point, namely, Descartes writes:[44]

> These nine years passed by, however, before I had yet taken any side concerning the difficulties that are customarily disputed among the learned or had begun to seek the foundations of any philosophy more certain than the vulgar. *And the example of many excellent minds, who, having had the plan before this, seemed to me not to have succeeded in it, caused me to imagine such difficulty in it that I would perhaps not have dared to undertake it so soon again, if I had not seen that some had already spread the rumor that I had achieved the goal of it. I cannot say on what they based this their opinion; and, if I have contributed something to it by my conversations, this must have been by confessing that of which I was ignorant more ingenuously than those who have studied a little are accustomed to do, and perhaps also by showing the reasons that I had for doubting many of those things which the others held to be certain, rather than by my boasting of any learning.* But, having a heart sincere enough not at all to want anyone to take me for other than I was, I thought that it was necessary that I were to try, by all means, to render myself worthy of the reputation that one had bestowed on me … .

Once again, the 'nine years' mentioned are from 1619 to 1628. Now, on the assumption – which this passage intimates – that Descartes did indeed say something to his fellow researchers that may have prompted them to start or to fuel 'the rumor' that he had achieved the goal of finding the foundations of a philosophy more certain than the vulgar, the question is, which of his 'conversations' might have contributed to this state of affairs?

One plausible answer is Descartes' active, substantive participation in the 'Chandoux Conference' of 1627.[45] The meeting was sponsored by, and took place at the Paris residence of, Guidi di Bagno (ca. 1565–1641), the French papal nuncio and later Cardinal who, though not himself a libertine, then entertained close ties to libertine circles.[46] The featured speaker was a certain Sieur de Chandoux, a French (al)chemist who professed medicine (he also happened to be a forger who in 1631 would be

[43] See Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 111: 'Although the *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii* … were once generally thought to have been composed in 1628, there have always been those who have believed that at least some of them were composed earlier, and … there is now good reason to suppose that the *Regulæ* were in fact composed between 1619–20 and 1626–8, and that a number of stages of composition are evident, some of the Rules comprising material composed at very different times.'

[44] See *Discourse*, pt. III, § 7 (AT, VI, 30–31) – emphasis added.

[45] See Baillet, *La Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes*, bk. II, ch. XIV, pp. 160–166, and *Vie de Monsieur Descartes*, pp. 69–74. Baillet places the conference in the fall of 1628. On the other hand, Geneviève Rodis-Lewis holds the earlier date to be correct. See *L'oeuvre de Descartes* (Paris, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 478–479, and cf. *Textes et débats: Descartes* (Paris, 1984), p. 63–64. Although Gaukroger agrees with Baillet, he points out that nothing depends on the year at issue (see *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 183). For my purposes, too, this is acceptable, since it does not much matter whether it was in 1627 or in 1628 that Descartes was externally pushed to work on his rules. Indeed, the later date might even strengthen the case that at the Chandoux Conference Descartes was intimating rules of the *Regulæ*. On the other hand, I do not want to be opportunistic about it.

[46] Even a decade later Descartes would be sure to see to it that Bagni receive copies of the *Discourse on the Method*. See Letters to Mersenne, Dec., 1638, and Jun. 19, 1639 (AT, II, 464 and 565).

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executed for counterfeiting).[47] Also present were, on the one hand, some of Descartes' closest associates, including Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), the Franciscan scholar with mechanistic tendencies who had been his fellow collegian at La Flèche and who would later become his 'literary agent',[48] and Étienne de Villebressieu (d. 1653), the French chemist, natural philosopher, and royal engineer with whom Descartes would share quarters,[49] as well as, on the other hand, others, including Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), the French Cardinal (from 1627 on) and founder of the Oratory who would soon encourage Descartes to pursue a philanthropic philosophy by means of the application of his method to such areas as medicine and mechanics.[50]

Now the featured nobleman's presentation, 'un grand discours' refuting the manner in which philosophy was ordinarily taught and learned in the schools but failing to elucidate the allegedly 'novel system' of his own, was generally ardently acclaimed by those present.[51] That is, except for Descartes, who – in 'a discourse on the method' of his own – accepted Chandoux's rejection of the reigning Scholastic mixture of Aristotelianism and Thomism, while demurring about the rest.[52] The gist of his sentiments appears to have been that knowledge would have to be based on certainty and not on probability – as Descartes took Chandoux to be suggesting –, as well as that without the proper method it would hardly be possible to distinguish between the probable and the certain.[53] The 'benefits' of Descartes' procedure were its capacity, first, to show whether a problem be soluble, and then, if so, to indicate how an infallible solution would look.[54] Thus did Descartes propose – but only after being pressed to do so by others – 'his own principles' or 'universal rule' or 'natural method' as an 'infallible means of avoiding plausible but fallacious inferences'.[55]

To be sure, all that is known about the material issues at stake here is that 'the rule' was modeled after 'the rules of mathematics' and that 'the method' was 'derived from the foundations of mathematics',[56] a discipline in which – 'above all others' – Descartes had, already during his college education, 'delighted … because of the certitude and the evidence of its reasonings' as well as because of its 'firm and solid foundations'.[57] For the idea was to begin with propositions that were so simple and so evident as to be indubitable, in order to progress from them to more and most complex propositions in such a way that no inferential step were not similarly beyond doubt.[58] None the less, it is also known that Descartes felt that from the Chandoux Conference he had received

[47] Cf. AT, XII, 95–98.
[48] Of whom see more below.
[49] Cf., e.g., Letter to Villebressieu, Summer, 1631 (AT, I, 215).
[50] Cf. Baillet, *Vie de Monsieur Descartes*, pp. 72–74.
[51] Cf. ibid., p. 70. [52] Cf. ibid., pp. 70–71. [53] Cf. ibid., pp. 71–72.
[54] See ibid., p. 72: 'Ce moyen … il mettait à l'épreuve toutes sortes de propositions. Le premier fruit de cette méthode était de faire voir d'abord si la proposition était possible ou non. L'autre fruit consistait à lui faire résoudre infailliblement la difficulté de la même proposition.'
[55] Cf. ibid.: '… ses propres principes … sa règle universelle … sa *Méthode naturelle* …'.
[56] Cf. Baillet, *La Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes*, bk. II, ch. XIV, pp. 160–166 (and context): '… [les] mathématiques … les règles de l'arithmétique …'. Cf. also Baillet, *Vie de Monsieur Descartes*, p. 72: '… ajoutant qu'il l'[the means of avoiding sophisms]avait tiré du fonds des mathématiques …'.
[57] See *Discourse*, pt. I, § 10 (AT, VI, 7–8).
[58] Cf. Baillet, *Vie de Monsieur Descartes*, pp. 70–72, and Descartes, *Regulæ*, Rs. 5–6 (AT, X, 379–387), and *Discourse*, pt. II, §§ 9 and 11–13 (AT, VI, 19–22).

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an exhortation 'to publish and to teach [his] principles', which he in any case judged to be 'better established, more veridical, and more natural' than any others.[59] For, even if he had not yet begun to write his first major work on method before the conference – which is highly unlikely –, much of it still must have been present in his mind beforehand, and after the conference he appears indeed to have been preoccupied with formulating the rules of it.[60]

Now the exposition of the method of the *Regulæ* is oriented on – but not to be identified with – the effort at an extension of geometrical algebra into a *mathesis universalis*. For the main aim is the attempt at a realization of the ideal of a universal mathematics capable of dealing specifically with all those aspects of its objects which can be ordered and measured independently of any particular material features; thus the first and foremost objects of this discipline turn out to be relations and proportions, not only between numbers, figures, et cetera, but also between stars, sounds, et cetera.[61] Therefore the account of the method given at the Chandoux Conference, which is essentially and fundamentally mathematical, may have provided the impetus for Descartes to formulate the de facto final version of the *Regulæ* with its central conception of a *mathesis universalis*.[62] Unfortunately, however, beyond the vaguely 'mathematical' character of the method set forth at the conference, there is little extant information on its content.[63] For example, both during and after the conference Descartes appears to

[59] See Letter to Villebressieu, Summer, 1631 (AT, I, 213): 'You have seen these two results [ces deux fruits] of my fine rule [ma belle règle] or of my natural method [Méthode naturelle] in the discussion [l'entretien] that was forced on me in the presence of the Papal Nuncio, of Cardinal de Bérulle, of Father Mersenne, and of all that great and learned company which was assembled at the Nuncio's residence to hear M. de Chandoux's discourse concerning his new philosophy [le discours … touchant sa nouvelle philosophie]. It was there that I made the whole company recognize what the art of reasoning well [l'art de bien raisonner] can do for the minds [l'esprit] of those who are of mediocre learning [ceux qui sont médiocrement savants], and how my principles [mes principes] are better established [mieux établis], more veridical [plus véritables], and more natural [plus naturels] than any of those others which are currently accepted among the men of learning [les gens d'étude]. You were as convinced as all the others, and you were all good enough to beg me to put my principles in writing and to teach them to the public [de les écrire et de les enseigner au public] … .'

[60] In his *Vitae Cartesii compendium* (Paris, 1653) Pierre Borel (of whom see more below) reports that, after Descartes had been urged at the Chandoux Conference to publish his principles – according to which he claimed to be able to demonstrate the truth in a mathematical manner in all matters –, he promised to do so and went to Holland for this purpose (p. 4): 'Exoratus tunc fuit, ut illa [sua principia] publici juris faceret; quod illis concedere coactus, in Hollandiam sese contulit ut ea melius digesta ederet.'

[61] Cf. *Regulæ*, Rs. 4 and 8 (AT, X, 375–379 and 394), and *Discourse*, pt. II, § 11 (AT, VI, 19–20: '… les divers rapports ou proportions … ces proportions en général …').

[62] In his journal Beeckman also reports on the encounter in Dordrecht of October 8, 1628, that Descartes provided him with 'clear samples' ('non obscura … specimina') of his mathematical results as well as that he promised to send to him 'his algebra, which he says is finished' ('… suam algebram, quam perfectam dicit …') – an algebra 'by means of which one arrives at a perfect science of geometry and with which one can even arrive at all human knowledge' ('… quaque ad perfectam geometriae scientiam pervenit, imo qua ad omnem cognitionem humanam pervenire potest …') (AT, X, 331–332). The specimens given (ibid., p. 333 ff.) are related to matters discussed in Rs. 14 and 15, while the hint at *mathesis universalis* – involving the extension of geometry, via the application of algebra, into a universal mathematical discipline – is obvious.

[63] But see Heinrich Springmeyer, Lüder Gäbe, and Hans Günter Zekl (eds.), *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii / Regeln zur Ausrichtung der Erkenntniskraft* (Hamburg, 1973), p. XXVI, where Gäbe may be

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have spoken in the singular of '[his] fine rule'.[64] But can any one of the rules of the *Regulæ* be certainly identified as the 'fine, universal rule' of the conference?[65]

After all, no single rule of the *Regulæ* is acknowledged in any such manner. On the contrary, if one peruses even the first half-dozen rules of the *Regulæ*, then one

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going somewhat beyond the evidence when he claims that at the Chandoux Conference Descartes talked 'concretely' about the *Regulæ*: 'Descartes hat in dem betreffenden Gespräch nicht nur allgemein über seine Methode, sondern konkret über die *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii* geredet, und man hat ihn gebeten, *dieses Buch* fertig zu schreiben und herauszugeben.'

[64] See, once again, Baillet, *Vie de Monsieur Descartes*, p. 72, and Descartes, Letter to Villebressieu, Summer, 1631 (AT, I, 213). Inferring from the fact that at the Chandoux Conference Descartes offered – 'by means of twelve probable arguments' – to prove false any supposed truth or to prove true any supposed falsehood (cf. both Borel, *Vitae Cartesii compendium*, p. 4 ['duodecim argumentis verisimilibus'], and Baillet, op. cit., p. 71 ['avec douze arguments tous plus vraissemblables l'un que l'autre']), Gäbe finds (*Regulæ / Regeln*, pp. XXV–XXVI) an immediate connection between his remarks there and the *Regulæ*, the number '12' being the key to the structure of this work. While there might be something to this, Descartes' usage of the number may also be just echoing the appeal to the classical tropes of skepticism, which were usually listed in groups of ten, five, and two. Cf. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism: Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations* (Cambridge, 1985), passim, as well as Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge, 1994), trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, esp. bk. I, chs. XIV–XVI. Of course, this is not at all to imply that on this occasion Descartes was advocating skepticism. On the contrary, he may have only been playing the devil's advocate by trying to make clear to those assembled how precarious their epistemological situation would be if they remained content with probability and did not strive for certainty. It almost goes without saying that the skeptical tropes were available to Descartes both through contemporary editions of Sextus' *Pyrrhoneion hypotyposeis* (e.g., Paris, 1562 [Latin], and Cologne/Paris/Geneva, 1621 [Greek]) and through the omnipresent editions of Montaigne's *Essays* – of which see more below –, esp. 'An Apology for Raymond Sebond' (cf. *Essays*, bk. II, ch. 12), where these tropes constitute the structure of much of the argument.

[65] According to Gaukroger, '[t]he only thing to be found in any extant writing of Descartes' from this period [i.e., that of the Chandoux Conference and of the later *Regulæ*] that could be described as "true and natural principles" is his doctrine of clear and distinct ideas' (*Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, pp. 183–184). But, aside from the fact that it is questionable whether there is a 'doctrine of clear and distinct ideas' in the *Regulæ* (of which see more below), Gaukroger's interpretation involves a tenuous revision of the traditional approach to the development of Descartes' attitude toward skepticism (ibid., p. 184): 'But I can find nothing in the *Discours* or the correspondence from this period to indicate any interest in scepticism on Descartes' part at this time [i.e., ca. 1628–1629], nor can I find any evidence at all that Descartes was motivated by an interest in scepticism before the 1630s.' Here Gaukroger is criticizing Richard H. Popkin's account of Descartes' reaction to the Chandoux Conference – cf. *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 174–175 –, which account emphasizes the connection between the reaction and the reference, e.g., to 'toutes les plus extravagantes suppositions des sceptiques' at the beginning of Part Four of the *Discourse* (AT, VI, 32). Thus, too, Gaukroger adds: '… sceptical questions are absent from the discussions of cognition in the *Regulæ* …' (op. cit., p. 319). Yet such a categorical statement does not fit well with passages such as R. 12, § 17, on what some might apprehend as Descartes' interpretation of Socratic skepticism. Moreover, Gaukroger appears to overlook the fact that the entire fourth part of the *Discourse*, which does indeed have the refutation of skepticism as one of its central concerns, is essentially a report on meditations performed some years previously, i.e., certainly in early 1629, possibly in late 1628, and probably – partially – both in late 1628 and in early 1629. To be sure, this does not mean that this account of Descartes' development is accurate merely because it is his own. None the less, the narratively retrospective character of Part Four of the *Discourse* does constitute vivid evidence against the understanding according to which Descartes was not at all concerned with skepticism before 1630 or according to which there were no evidence of his having been thus concerned. This holds a fortiori when one considers the arguably 'anti-tropical' aspects of the challenge issued by Descartes to his colleagues at the Chandoux Conference.

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recognizes that each and every one of them has something special about it that would allow Descartes to describe it as uniquely 'established, veridical, and natural'. For example, Rule 1, concerning the formation of solid and true judgments as the direction in which the natural intelligence has to move, is 'not without merit' selected as the first of all.[66] Rule 2, concerning the role of certainty and that of probability in the search for knowledge, displays a remarkable resemblance to what is preserved of the discussion at the Chandoux Conference.[67] Rule 3, concerning evident intuition and certain deduction as the only modes of inference in the acquisition of knowledge, contains an initial intimation of evidence as the key to knowledge.[68] Rule 4, concerning the necessity of method for the investigation of the truth of things, defines method in terms of rules and thus may be characterized as that rule which prescribes that the strictest rule of all is that rules are indispensable in the search for the truth.[69] Rule 5, concerning both (1) analysis or resolution or regression from complicated and obscure propositions to simple and clear ones and (2) synthesis or composition or progression from simple and clear propositions to complex and clear ones, begins with the statement that '*the whole method consists in* the order and arrangement of the things on which the vision of the mind has to be focused'.[70] Rule 6, concerning the distinction between the simplest things and the complicated ones and the identification of the former, asserts that 'there is no more useful proposition in this entire treatise'.[71] Among the rules of the *Regulæ*, then, one enjoys considerable latitude in choosing one that could qualify as Descartes' 'first and foremost' rule of the time.

Yet a sensible alternative might be to take the hint when Descartes speaks of '[his] fine rule *or* natural method'.[72] Indeed, although in the context of the Chandoux Conference Descartes does talk about '[his] principes' in the plural,[73] he does not speak of 'règles' in the same number. Thus, while there are multiple 'principles', there is but one 'rule' or 'method', which would, then, be unique.[74] Now, whatever rule or method is at stake here, the rule seems to be in some sense a method and the method seems to be in some sense a rule. In fact, when Descartes uses the term 'règle' in this context, he may also have in mind one of the perfectly legitimate Latinate senses of the time, namely, 'rule' as a – method(olog)ical – 'measure' or 'standard'.[75] In a word, he may very well mean 'règle' in the sense of 'criterion' – as in 'criterion of truth', thereby making it reasonable to assume that such a rule or method would have had something,

[66] See AT, X, 360: 'Ac proinde non immerito hanc regulam primam omnium proponimus … .'
[67] See ibid., pp. 362–366, passim.
[68] See ibid., p. 366: '… evidenter …'.
[69] See ibid., pp. 371–372 (§ 1).
[70] See ibid., p. 379 (emphasis added): '*Tota methodus consistit in* … .'
[71] See ibid., p. 381: '… nec ulla [propositio] utilior est in toto hoc tractatu …'.
[72] See, once again, Letter to Villebressieu, Summer, 1631 (AT, I, 213): '… ma belle règle *ou* Méthode naturelle …' (emphasis added).
[73] See ibid.: '… mes principes …' (emphasis added).
[74] Cf., once again, Baillet, *Vie de Monsieur Descartes*, p. 72: '… ce moyen suivant ses propres principes. Ce moyen n'était autre que sa règle universelle *qu'il appelait autrement* [this emphasis added] sa *Méthode naturelle* … .' This statement is especially remarkable.
[75] Cf. Karl Ernst Georges, *Ausführliches Lateinisch-Deutsches Handwörterbuch* (Darmstadt, 1992), vol. 2, col. 2285.

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however indeterminable now, to do with *evidence* as the criterion of knowledge.[76] For the French 'règle' is derived from the Latin 'regula' and both have a common ancestor in the Indo-European root 'reg-'.[77] Accordingly, a rule (originally: a rod) is what guides or leads someone in the 'di*rec*tion' (another common descendant of the same root)[78] of a goal – which is precisely what a method does.[79] To proceed according to a method is to follow some rules. Both philosophical investigation in general and scientific research in particular are rule-governed – but not rule-determined – activities.[80] Then the emphasis is neither on the rules that compose the method nor on the method that comprises the rules, but rather on a method as the rule, that is, as the measure, of philosophical and scientific progress. The point is that, when Descartes speaks of 'his … rule' here, he need not be intending any one of the rules of the *Regulæ* in particular, but rather could he be referring to the rules of the method in general – and especially to those which are directly related to evidence[81] – as 'my fine measure or natural standard'. In any case, this interpretation is consistent with the reflexive definition, in the *Regulæ*, both of 'method' in terms of rules and of 'rules' in terms of method (*pars pro toto et totum pro parte*).[82]

In conclusion, the Chandoux Conference is surely one of the most important events of Descartes' life that can be directly connected to the writing of the *Regulæ*. But the truth of the matter, in so far as it is at all attainable, may lie in the mean between the extremes of underdetermination and overdetermination. For, mainly and mostly due to the fact that comparatively little of Descartes' correspondence from the decade 1620–1630 has survived, scholars may just have to deal with the situation that some aspects of the question about the exact timing of the composition of the *Regulæ* are undecidable. Moreover, the sedimented origins of the affair render it far harder to identify the *terminus a quo* than the *terminus ad quem*. In any case, there is enough evidence that Descartes was finishing his work on the *Regulæ* at about the same time at which he was shifting his permanent residence from France to Holland.[83] Therefore, if

[76] Cf., e.g., Letter to Mersenne, Oct. 16, 1639 (AT, II, 597–598), where Descartes says that he has no 'criterion of truth' other than the natural light of reason: '… pour moi, je n'ai pour règle des miennes [i.e., de mes vérités] que la lumière naturelle …'.

[77] Cf., e.g., 'Appendix of Indo-European Roots', *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* (Boston/New York/London, 1992), pp. 2121–2122.

[78] Cf. ibid., p. 527.

[79] Cf. ibid., p. 1135. The English 'method', the German 'Methode', and the French 'méthode' all derive from the Latin 'methodus' and from the Greek 'methodos' ('pursuit' = 'meta' [along, with, after] + 'hodos' [path, way, journey]). Thus the original meaning of the term is still alive, a method being 'a means or manner of procedure, especially a *regular* and systematic way of accomplishing something' (emphasis added).

[80] For a fine survey of the origin and of the development of the idea of 'method' in the history of Western philosophy see the series of articles by Joachim Ritter et al., 'Methode' (etc.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. J. Ritter and K. Gründer, vol. 5 (Darmstadt, 1980), cols. 1304–1386.

[81] Cf., e.g., Rs. 2 and 3.

[82] Cf. R. 4, § 1 (AT, X, 371–372).

[83] With respect to 'the vexed question of whether Descartes spent the winter of 1628/9 in France or in the Netherlands', Gaukroger is first 'inclined to accept the argument … that he spent the time in the Netherlands' (*Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 443). But then, only a few lines later on the same page, he asserts that 'Descartes had spent the winter of 1628/9 in the countryside of Brittany' (ibid.). The fact that such a superb account still contains such an egregious inconsistency serves to highlight the degree of difficulty involved. Still, I do concur with Gaukroger's statement in the

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'the date of the *Regulæ*' is strictly construed as the time of their final redaction, that is, as the time during which Descartes was bestowing on the text that form in which it has been handed down and in which it is now printed, then this date would most probably be the autumn of 1628.[84]

Prolegomena: The 'Metaphysical Correspondence' (1630)

To be sure, neither Descartes' early 'Treatise on Metaphysics' as such nor much of his correspondence from the decade 1620–1630 has survived. None the less, there are several crucial letters dating from this period which can provide insight into the nature of the research in which Descartes was engaged immediately after having interrupted the work on the *Regulæ*. For these letters, all to Mersenne, first elaborate what has since become known as 'Descartes' doctrine of eternal truths'.[85] Now there is a strong connection between the 'Treatise on Metaphysics' of 1629 and what may be referred to as the 'Metaphysical Correspondence' of 1630,[86] as well as good reason to think that elements of the former are being revealed in the latter.[87] Indeed, it is in direct connection with his expressed opinion that he has discovered 'how one can demonstrate the metaphysical truths in a fashion that is more evident than the demonstrations of geometry' that Descartes develops his views on 'the eternal truths' in the greatest detail.[88] What, if anything, then, does this correspondence reveal about Descartes' intellectual concerns after his thinking turned away from methodology in 1628 and toward metaphysics in 1629, and how is this relevant for a reading of the *Regulæ*?

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main text that 'although Descartes had been in the Netherlands in October [of 1628], he probably returned to Paris in November, not actually moving permanently until the beginning of 1629' (see ibid., p. 183, and cf. ibid., p. 187).

[84] See Gäbe, *Regulæ / Regeln*, p. XXII: 'Unter dem *Datum* der *Regulæ* kann demgemäß nur die Zeit ihrer letzten Redaktion verstanden werden, die Zeit also, in der der Text diejenige Form angenommen hat, in der er uns überliefert ist und in der vorliegenden Ausgabe abgedruckt wurde. Dies ist mit der größten Wahrscheinlichkeit der Herbst 1628.'

[85] See Letters to Mersenne, Apr. 15 (AT, I, 135–147), May 6 (ibid., pp. 148–150), and May 27, 1630 (ibid., pp. 151–154). Also relevant to 'the doctrine of eternal truths' are Letter to Mersenne, May 27, 1638 (AT, II, 138), To Mesland, May 2, 1644 (AT, IV, 111–120), *Replies to the Fifth and Sixth Sets of Objections to the 'Meditations'*, and *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §§ 22–24 and 48–49.

[86] Cf., e.g., Letter to Mersenne, Apr. 15, 1630, where Descartes says about 'a metaphysical question [question … métaphysique] which is to be examined by human reason' (AT, I, 144): 'I think that all those to whom God has given the use of this reason have an obligation to employ it principally in the endeavor to know him and to know themselves.' Once again, knowledge of God and knowledge of the self were the twin topics of the 'Treatise on Metaphysics'. Cf. To Mersenne, Nov. 25, 1630 (AT, I, 182).

[87] Cf. Letter to Mersenne, Apr. 15, 1630, where, before focusing on the relationship between 'the mathematical ["eternal"] truths' and God, Descartes refers to his 'metaphysical investigations' (AT, I, 144): 'During my first nine months [i.e., at the beginning of 1629 and perhaps even already at the end of 1628] in this country [Holland] I worked on nothing else.' The clear implication in context is that in the following remarks on 'mathematical truths' Descartes is going to be drawing on his earlier inquiries into 'metaphysical truths'.

[88] See Letter to Mersenne, Apr. 15, 1630 (AT, I, 144): '… comment on peut démontrer les vérités métaphysiques, d'une façon qui est plus évidente que les démonstrations de géométrie …'.

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In the first letter Descartes says that 'the mathematical truths' held by human beings to be 'eternal' are, in effect, creatures of God, and that such truths, at least from God's standpoint, are thus not at all 'necessary':[89]

> But … I shall touch on several metaphysical questions, and especially on this one: whether the mathematical truths which you call 'eternal' have been established by God and depend on him entirely, as well as do all the rest of his creatures. In fact, to say that these truths are independent of God is to talk of him as if he were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject him to the Styx and to the Fates. Please do not hesitate to assert and to proclaim everywhere that it is God who has established these laws in nature, just as a king establishes laws in his kingdom. For there is not one of them that we cannot comprehend if our mind turns to consider it, and they are all inborn in our minds, just as a king would imprint his laws on the hearts of all his subjects if he had enough power to do so. On the other hand, we cannot comprehend the grandeur of God, even though we know it. But the very fact that we judge it incomprehensible makes us esteem it more; just as a king has more majesty when he is less familiarly known by his subjects, provided, of course, that they do not think, due to this lack of familiarity, that they are without a king, and that they know him well enough to be in no doubt about this. One will tell you: 'If God had established these truths, then he could change them as a king does his laws.' To this it is necessary to respond: Yes, if his will can change. 'But I comprehend them to be eternal and immutable.' – And I, for my part, judge the same about God. 'But his will is free.' – Yes, but his power is incomprehensible; and, in general, we can well assert that God can do all that which we can comprehend, but not that he cannot do that which we cannot comprehend; for it would be rash to think that our imagination reaches as far as his power.

Here a most important kind of truth is radically contingent in that it is entirely dependent on the free will of God who creates it – with ineluctable implications for all truth. This is essentially a *theological* theory of truth.[90]

[89] See ibid., pp. 145–146: 'Mais je ne laisserai pas de toucher … plusieurs questions métaphysiques, et particulièrement celle-ci: Que les vérités mathématiques, lesquelles vous nommez éternelles, ont été établies de Dieu et en dépendant entièrement, aussi bien que tout le reste des créatures. C'est en effet parler de Dieu comme d'un Jupiter ou Saturne, et l'assujettir au Styx et aux destinées, que de dire que ces vérités sont indépendantes de lui. Ne craignez point, je vous prie, d'assurer et de publier partout, que c'est Dieu qui a établi ces lois en la nature, ainsi qu'un roi établit des lois en son royaume. Or il n'y en a aucune en particulier que nous ne puissions comprendre si notre esprit se porte à la considérer, et elles sont toutes *mentibus nostris ingenitae*, ainsi qu'un roi imprimerait ses lois dans le coeur de tous ses sujets, s'il en avait aussi bien le pouvoir. Au contraire nous ne pouvons comprendre la grandeur de Dieu, encore que nous la connaissions. Mais cela même que nous la jugeons incompréhensible nous la fait estimer davantage; ainsi qu'un roi a plus de majesté lorsqu'il est moins familièrement connu de ses sujets, pourvu toutefois qu'ils ne pensent pas pour cela être sans roi, et qu'ils le connaissent assez pour n'en point douter. On vous dira que si Dieu avait établi ces vérités, il les pourrait changer comme un roi fait ses lois; à quoi il faut répondre que oui, si sa volonté peut changer. – Mais je les comprends comme éternelles et immuables. – Et moi je juge le même de Dieu. – Mais sa volonté est libre. – Oui, mais sa puissance est incompréhensible; et généralement nous pouvons bien assurer que Dieu peut faire tout ce que nous pouvons comprendre, mais non pas qu'il ne peut faire ce que nous ne pouvons pas comprendre; car ce serait témérité de penser que notre imagination a autant d'étendue que sa puissance.'

[90] Though Descartes would contest this characterization – cf. AT, I, 144. Note that the analogy between the laws of nature established by God and the laws of a kingdom instituted by a king may rest on a moot point, namely, whether the monarch is understood as subject to or as above the laws of the land.

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In the second letter Descartes looks at the issue of how human beings are to think about the relationship between 'the mathematical truths' and 'the metaphysical truths' and argues that the former depend on the latter:[91]

> As for the eternal truths, I say, once again, that they are true or possible only because God knows them as true or as possible, and that they are not, on the contrary, known as true by God in such a way that they would be true independently of him. And, if human beings really understood the sense of their words, then they could never say without blasphemy that the truth of anything is prior to the knowledge which God has of it, for, in God, to will and to know are a single thing in such a way that by the very fact that he wills something he knows it and it is only for this reason that such a thing is true. Therefore one must not say that, if God did not exist, then these truths would still be true; for the existence of God is the first and the most eternal of all the truths that there can be and the one from which alone all the others proceed. But it is easy to be mistaken about this, because most human beings do not regard God as a being who is infinite and incomprehensible, and who is the sole author on whom all things depend; rather, they get stuck at the syllables of his name and think that one knows enough about him if one knows that 'God' means the same as what is meant by 'Deus' in Latin, and the same as the one who is adored by human beings. Those who have no higher thoughts than these can easily become atheists; and, because they perfectly comprehend the mathematical truths, but not the truth of the existence of God, it is no wonder that they do not think that the former depend on the latter. But they should rather make the opposite judgment, namely, that, since God is a cause whose power surpasses the bounds of the human understanding, and since the necessity of these truths does not exceed our knowledge, these truths are therefore something less than, and subject to, this incomprehensible power.

Concisely and precisely: Truths are true because God wills them to be; God does not recognize them to be true because they are.[92] Indeed, the metaphysical truth that God exists would be the source of all other truth.

[91] See Letter to Mersenne, May 6, 1630 (AT, I, 149–150): 'Pour les vérités éternelles, je dis derechef que *sunt tantum verae aut possibiles, quia Deus illas veras aut possibiles cognoscit, non autem contra veras a Deo cognosci quasi independenter ab illo sint verae*. Et si les hommes entendaient bien le sens de leurs paroles, ils ne pourraient jamais dire sans blasphème, que la vérité de quelque chose précède la connaissance que Dieu en a, car en Dieu ce n'est qu'un de vouloir et de connaître; de sorte que *ex hoc ipso quod aliquid velit, ideo cognoscit, et ideo tantum talis res est vera*. Il ne faut donc pas dire que *si Deus non esset, nihilominus istae veritates essent verae*; car l'existence de Dieu est la première et la plus éternelle de toutes les vérités qui peuvent être, et la seule d'où procèdent toutes les autres. Mais ce qui fait qu'il est aisé en ceci de se méprendre, c'est que la plupart des hommes ne considèrent pas Dieu comme un être infini et incompréhensible, et qui est le seul auteur duquel toutes choses dépendent; mais ils s'arrêtent aux syllabes de son nom, et pensent que c'est assez le connaître, si on sait que *Dieu* veut dire le même que ce qui s'appelle *Deus* en latin, et qui est adoré par les hommes. Ceux qui n'ont point de plus hautes pensées que cela, peuvent aisément devenir athées; et parce qu'ils comprennent parfaitement les vérités mathématiques, et non pas celle de l'existence de Dieu, ce n'est pas merveille s'ils ne croient pas qu'elles en dépendent. Mais ils devraient juger au contraire, que puisque Dieu est une cause dont la puissance surpasse les bornes de l'entendement humain, et que la nécessité de ces vérités n'excède point notre connaissance, qu'elles sont quelque chose de moindre, et de sujet à cette puissance incompréhensible.'

[92] This will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the *Bible*. For the Judaeo-Christian God can, even ethically speaking, command human beings to kill (cf., e.g., *Genesis*, ch. 22, v. 2), to steal (cf., e.g., *Exodus*, ch. 12, v. 35), and to fornicate (cf., e.g., *Hosea*, ch. 1, v. 2), etc., and the very fact that he orders it makes it right. For an attempt at a philosophical justification of this radical divine voluntarism in ethics see Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I–II, ques. 94 ('De lege naturali'), art. 5, obj. and resp. 2.

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In the third letter Descartes focuses on the causal relationship between God and the eternal truths as well as on the epistemic relationship between human beings as finite beings and God as an infinite being:[93]

> You ask me by what kind of causality God has established the eternal truths. I reply that it is by the same kind of causality by which he has created all things, that is to say, as efficient and total cause. For it is certain that he is the author of the essence as well as of the existence of creatures, and this essence is nothing other than the eternal truths, which I do not conceive as emanating from God like the rays from the sun; but I know that God is the author of all things and that these truths are something, and, consequently, that he is their author. I say that I know this, and not that I conceive it or that I comprehend it; for one can know that God is infinite and all powerful, even though our soul, being finite, cannot comprehend or conceive him; in the same way, we can well touch a mountain with our hands, but we cannot embrace it as we could a tree or something else that would not exceed the size of our arms. For to comprehend something is to embrace it by one's thought; but to know something, it suffices to touch it with one's thought. You also ask what has necessitated God to create these truths; and I reply that he has been free to make it the case that it not be true that all the radii of the circle are equal – just as free as he was not to create the world. And it is certain that these truths are no more necessarily attached to his essence than are the other creatures. You ask what God has done in order to produce them. I reply that from all eternity he has willed and understood them to be, and, by that very fact, he has created them, or, if you reserve the word 'created' for the existence of things, then he has established them and made them. For, in God, to will, to understand, and to create are the same thing, without the one's being prior to the other even conceptually.

Cognitively speaking, human beings could 'know' but would never be able to 'comprehend' the divine being. Therefore the metaphysical foundations of human knowledge would lie beyond the bounds of human knowledge.

Now what do these metaphysical investigations have to do with the methodological reflections of the *Regulæ*? Well, the fact that the scope of Descartes' research interests was constantly shifting by late 1629 and by early 1630 should not obscure the fact that he had reached the crucial turning point away from methodology and toward metaphysics in late 1628 and in early 1629. In other words, Descartes has two basic approaches to epistemic foundationalism, namely, the one, methodological, and the other, metaphysical. By 'epistemic foundationalism' is meant the attempt to find a basis

[93] See Letter to Mersenne, May 27, 1630 (AT, I, 151–153): 'Vous me demandez *in quo genere causae Deus disposuit aeternas veritates*. Je vous réponds que c'est *in eodem genere causae* qu'il a créé toutes choses, c'est-à-dire *ut efficiens et totalis causa*. Car il est certain qu'il est aussi bien auteur de l'essence comme de l'existence des créatures: or cette essence n'est autre chose que ces vérités éternelles, lesquelles je ne conçois point émaner de Dieu, comme les rayons du soleil; mais je sais que Dieu est auteur de toutes choses, et que ces vérités sont quelque chose, et par conséquent qu'il en est auteur. Je dis que je le sais, et non pas que je le conçois ni que je le comprends; car on ne peut savoir que Dieu est infini et tout-puissant, encore que notre âme étant finie ne le puisse comprendre ni concevoir; de même que nous pouvons bien toucher avec les mains une montagne, mais non pas l'embrasser comme nous ferions un arbre, ou quelque autre chose que ce soit, qui n'excédât point la grandeur de nos bras: car comprendre, c'est embrasser de la pensée; mais pour savoir une chose, il suffit de la toucher de la pensée. Vous demandez aussi qui a nécessité Dieu à créer ces vérités; et je dis qu'il a été aussi libre de faire qu'il ne fût pas vrai que toutes les lignes tirées du centre à la circonférence fussent égales, comme de ne pas créer le monde. Et il est certain que ces vérités ne sont pas plus nécessairement conjointes à son essence que les autres créatures. Vous demandez ce que Dieu a fait pour les produire. Je dis que *ex hoc ipso quod illas ab aeterno esse voluerit et intellexerit, illas creavit*, ou bien (si vous n'attribuez le mot de *creavit* qu'à l'existence des choses) *illas disposuit et fecit*. Car c'est en Dieu une même chose de vouloir, d'entendre, et de créer, sans que l'un précède l'autre, *ne quidem ratione*.'

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for knowledge more basic than which none can be based: On the one hand, 'methodological' is an approach that concentrates on how truths come to be known; on the other hand, 'metaphysical' is one that focuses on how truths come to be true. The methodological approach is the earlier, and the metaphysical is the later, for the former is that of the *Regulæ* (1619–1628), and the latter would be that of the 'Treatise on Metaphysics' (1628–1629) as well as of the 'Metaphysical Correspondence' (1630).[94] Therefore the full turn from methodology to metaphysics occurs in Descartes' thought from 1628 to 1630, and it is this 'turn' which sets the stage for the 'classic' formulation of his philosophy as found in the *Discourse*, in the *Meditations*, and in the *Principles*. Thus even the familiar exposition of 'the principle rules of the method' in the *Discourse on the Method* amounts to hardly more than a flashback.[95] Yet none of this is to be crudely construed as implying that there were no metaphysics in the *Regulæ* or no methodology in the *Discourse*, for example.

In any case, by the spring of 1630 the seeds of Descartes' theological theory of truth had also already been planted. It is this account of truth, with its accompanying theory of evidence and of knowledge, which then goes on to become the 'classic' Cartesian doctrine of the *Discourse*, of the *Meditations*, and of the *Principles*. According to this account, truth is 'the conformity of thought and of object',[96] all that human beings clearly and distinctly perceive is true, and this is the case because God guarantees it – et cetera.[97] But the following facts about the *Regulæ*, whose account of knowledge threatens to sink into oblivion, are also remarkable: *First*, there is no reference at all to 'the eternal truths'.[98] *Second*, the expressions 'metaphysics' and 'metaphysical' do not occur even a single time.[99] *Third*, God is mentioned only once – and then merely as part of

[94] Once again, since it is uncertain whether Descartes 'moved' from France to Holland at the end of 1628 or at the beginning of 1629, his claim that 'during the first nine months in Holland he had worked on nothing but metaphysics' – cf. Letter to Mersenne, Apr. 15, 1630 (AT, I, 144) – contains a certain degree of ineradicable indeterminacy. Perhaps it is reasonable to assume that most (if not all) of what was *written* of the 'Treatise on Metaphysics' was *written* in 1629. But to work is not necessarily to write.

[95] Of which see more below.

[96] Cf. Letter to Mersenne, Oct. 16, 1639 (AT, II, 597): '… I, for my part, have never had any doubts about truth [la vérité], because it seems to me that it is a notion so transcendentally clear [une notion si transcendantalement claire] that it is impossible [impossible] to be ignorant of it. … but there is no way to learn what truth is, if one does not know it by nature [de nature]. For what reason would we have for accepting anything which could teach us the nature of truth if we did not know that it were true, that is to say, if we did not know truth? Of course, it is possible to explain [expliquer] the meaning of the word [*quid nominis*] to someone who does not know the language [la langue], and to tell him that the word 'truth' [ce mot *vérité*], in the strict sense [en sa propre signification], denotes [dénote] the conformity of thought with its object [la conformité de la pensée avec l'objet], but that, when it is attributed to things outside thought [choses qui sont hors de la pensée], it means only that these things can serve as the objects of true thoughts [d'objets à des pensées véritables], either ours or God's. But one cannot give any logical definition [aucune définition de logique] which would help to discover its nature [sa nature]. I think the same of many other things which are very simple and which are known naturally … if one tries to define these things, then one only obscures them and causes confusion.' The question is, of course, whether this account of truth can peacefully coexist with the views regarding the 'eternal truths' of the 'Metaphysical Correspondence' of 1630.

[97] Of which see more below.

[98] The *Regulæ* do not even contain the adjective 'aeternus'.

[99] The *Regulæ* do not contain the substantive 'metaphysica' or the corresponding adjective. Interestingly, neither do the *Meditations* proper contain the word 'methodus' (cf. AT, VII, 3 and 7).

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an example.[100] *Fourth*, there is only one occurrence of 'clarity and distinctness' as a pair, so one can hardly say that there is a 'doctrine of clear and distinct ideas'.[101] *Fifth*, there is no reference to a 'general rule of truth' that whatever one clearly and distinctly perceives must also be true and cannot be false.[102] *Sixth*, since there is no such rule, there is also no claim of a proof or of a demonstration of the same and a fortiori no appeal to God as the guarantor of the relationship between evidence and truth – which are distinctive features of the 'mature' Descartes' thinking on these topics. And these are just several of the many examples of the uniqueness of the *Regulæ* vis-à-vis Descartes' later works. Yet the purpose of the *Regulæ* is also to provide rules for the investigation and for the achievement of the truth of things. In a word, as far as the foundations of knowledge are concerned, the 'Metaphysical Correspondence' and the *Meditations* have much more in common with each other than does either with the *Regulæ* – and this despite the quasi-reversed temporal relations.

As a result, whereas the Descartes of the *Regulæ* is primarily and ultimately interested in methodological issues, the Descartes of the 'Metaphysical Correspondence' is occupied first and foremost with metaphysical inquiries. In other words, the early Descartes was at a crossroads at the end of the 1620's and at the beginning of the 1630's. For, while he would, as a natural philosopher, continue to engage in the scientific study of physical phenomena – that is, in research which, especially in the years from the end of 1630 to the end of 1633, would involve a great deal of frustration on his part –,[103] the nagging question of whether 'first philosophy' (*prima philosophia*) would emerge as methodology or as metaphysics had, in effect, already been answered by his turn away from the topic of method and toward the field of metaphysics.

Therefore, understanding the *Regulæ* 'on their own terms' means precisely not reading them as a text with respect to which it could be assumed that there were a

[100] Cf. R. 12, § 17 (AT, X, 421–422).

[101] Cf. R. 11, § 2 (AT, X, 407): '… ut propositio clare et distincte … intelligatur …'. (But, to be extra fair, see also R. 12, § 13, and R. 16, § 5.) Note that this does not at all amount to a claim that it can be 'proved' or 'demonstrated' that all that which is clearly and distinctly perceived is true. For all the occurrences of 'clare' and 'clarus' (etc.) as well as of 'distincte' and 'distinctus' (etc.) in the *Regulæ* see the Index of the present volume.

[102] Thus I am considerably less sanguine than Gaukroger about finding 'his [Descartes'] doctrine of clear and distinct ideas' in the *Regulæ* (cf. *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, pp. 183–184). But it all depends on what one means by 'doctrine', and therefore there is latitude for interpretation on this point.

[103] Cf., e.g., Letter to Mersenne, Apr. 15, 1630 (AT, I, 144–145), where the purpose of the metaphysical reflections on the eternal truths is the investigation of 'the foundations of physics': 'That [the metaphysical question of the use of human reason to acquire knowledge of God and knowledge of the self] is the task with which I began my studies; and I can tell you that I would have never been able to discover the foundations of physics [les fondements de la physique] if I had not looked for them along that path. But it is the topic which I have studied more than any other [la matière que j'ai le plus étudiée de toutes], and … in my physics [en ma physique] I shall touch on several metaphysical questions [plusieurs questions métaphysiques] … .' The 'physics', which Descartes mentions several times in the course of this letter and which he promises to get to Mersenne 'by the beginning of the year 1633' (ibid., p. 137), would turn out to be the unpublishable *Treatise on the World*. See To Mersenne, Nov. 25, 1630 (AT, I, 179): '… la promesse que je vous ai faite, d'avoir achevé mon *Monde* dans trois ans …'.

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continuous and uninterrupted development from there to the 'classic' Cartesian works.[104] Thus it also involves performing a hermeneutical epoché by bracketing out a great deal of later context in order to neutralize the danger of projecting it back into the earlier text. Of course, one might also try, for a change, understanding the *Discourse*, the *Meditations*, and the *Principles* in terms of the *Regulæ*.

Text and Context I: The 'Regulæ' and the 'Discourse' (1637)[105]

To be sure, the material overlapping and underlapping between the method of the *Rules for the Direction of the Natural Intelligence* and the rules of the *Discourse on the Method* are remarkable.[106] None the less, to reflect on the formal relationship between these works is already to encounter a pair of factors whose elements are inversely related in a curious fashion. That is, although *chronologically* the *Regulæ* are by far *prior* while the *Discourse* is by far *posterior*, *methodologically* the former is much more *developed* while the latter is much more *rudimentary*. Moreover, the observation on constitution holds not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, since the degree of discrimination of the dozens of rules of the *Regulæ* is almost incomparably higher than that of the handful of rules of the *Discourse*. Prima facie, at least, this is paradoxical.

To begin to explain this apparent reversal of roles, of course, one might point out that the *Regulæ* were scholarly, technical, and esoteric, but that the *Discourse* be popular, pragmatic, and exoteric. Now these factors obviously possess valid but limited explanatory power. Still, a more effective approach would focus, not so much on the disparity, but much rather on the commonality, of these texts, for they are also related as text and metatext. In fact, the *Discourse* does not at all represent a 'progress report' on a methodology that had been discovered recently, that is, in the middle of the decade 1630–1640; rather, it offers a sampling of the rules of that method which Descartes had been following in his scientific research for a long time and which he had already formulated in the *Regulæ* long ago, that is, by the end of the decade 1620–1630. Thus one of the things that Descartes does in the *Discourse* is to report on some of the procedures that he had recorded in the *Regulæ* – but left unpublished. So, although the *Discourse* refers to the *Regulæ*, there is no indication of any intention toward complete coverage.[107] Publication demanded simplification.[108]

[104] For loci where Descartes himself emphasizes the differences – and even the oppositions – between his earlier and later positions cf., e.g., *Author's Replies to the Sixth Set of Objections* (to the *Meditations*), AT, VII, 440–441; Letter to Vatier, Feb. 22, 1638 (AT, I, 561); etc.

[105] In this section I have, inter alia, adapted and improved some formulations from the Interpretive Essay of my earlier edition *Discours de la méthode / Discourse on the Method* – cf. ibid., esp. pp. 128–135.

[106] Cf., e.g., Étienne Gilson (ed.), *René Descartes, Discours de la méthode* (Paris, 1925/1987), pp. 197–214 and 486–490; Leslie John Beck, *The Method of Descartes: A Study of the 'Regulæ'* (Oxford, 1952; New York, 1987), pp. 1 ff. and 149 ff.; etc.

[107] On the contrary. See Letter to Mersenne, Mar., 1636 (AT, I, 339): 'In this project [ce *projet*] I reveal a part of my method [une partie de ma méthode] … .' And To Vatier, Feb. 22, 1638 (ibid., p. 559): '… my purpose [mon dessein] was not at all to teach the whole of my method [toute ma méthode] in the discourse [le discours] in which I propose it … .'

[108] See the 'Letter of the Author to the Translator' of the French edition of the *Principia philosophiae* (Paris, 1647) (AT, IX/2, 15): '… un discours [de] la Méthode … où je mis sommairement les principales règles de la logique …'. Thus the *Discourse* would be but a 'summary'.

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Thus the connection between the plethora of complex rules of the *Regulæ* and the paucity of simple rules of the *Discourse* becomes controversial precisely because it would be superficial to regard the latter as merely or essentially a popular summary of the former. For instance, there is the extreme position that, given the determinacy of the method of the *Regulæ* and the indeterminacy of that of the *Discourse*, to look for Descartes' methodology in the latter instead of in the former is to look in the wrong place. Yet this is a matter, not of 'either … or …', but of 'both … and …'. In addition, there is the curious opinion that the *Rules for the Direction of the Natural Intelligence* represent the genuine *Discourse on the Method*.[109] But this cannot be accurate, for neither are the *Regulæ* a *discourse* on method nor is the *Discourse* a *treatise* of rules. After all, neither would the Descartes of the 1620's have written the *Discourse* for himself nor would the Descartes of the 1630's have written the *Regulæ* for others. For each work was produced under circumstances peculiar to it.

Now there surely is – with respect to actually listed rules of method – a certain lack of balance between the rules of the *Regulæ* and the method of the *Discourse*. For there is little in the latter that is not in the former, whereas there is much in the former that is not in the latter. Still, if one were to select only those rules of the *Regulæ* which as directly as possible anticipate the method of the *Discourse*, then one might indeed attempt to establish the following – *nomen est omen* – 'correspondences':[110]

Rules of the *Regulæ*:	Rules of the *Discourse*:
We should attend only to those objects for whose certain and indubitable cognition our natural intelligence seems to suffice. (Rule 2)	The first was never to accept anything as true that I did not evidently know to be such, that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitation and prejudice, and to include in my judgments nothing more than that which would present itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I were to have no occasion to put it into doubt. ('The Rule of Evidence and of Justification')
Concerning proposed objects, one has to investigate, not what others may have felt or what we ourselves shall conjecture, but what we can clearly and evidently intuit or certainly deduce – for knowledge is acquired in no other way. (Rule 3)	
If we would perfectly understand a question, then it has to be abstracted from every superfluous conception,	The second was to divide each of the difficulties that I would examine into as many parts as would be possible

[109] Cf. E. J. Dijksterhuis, *De Mechanisering van het Wereldbeeld* (Amsterdam, 1959), IV, §§ 195–198.

[110] The Latin text of the rules of the *Regulæ* is, of course, provided in the present edition (see below). The French text of the rules of the *Discours* is as follows (cf. AT, VI, 18–19): 'Le premier était de ne recevoir jamais aucune chose pour vraie, que je ne la connusse évidemment être telle: c'est-à-dire, d'éviter soigneusement la précipitation et la prévention; et de ne comprendre rien de plus en mes jugements, que ce qui se présenterait si clairement et si distinctement à mon esprit, que je n'eusse aucune occasion de le mettre en doute. Le second, de diviser chacune des difficultés que j'examinerais, en autant de parcelles qu'il se pourrait, et qu'il serait requis pour les mieux résoudre. Le troisième, de conduire par ordre mes pensées, en commençant par les objets les plus simples et les plus aisés à connaître, pour monter peu à peu, comme par degrés, jusques à la connaissance des plus composés; et supposant même de l'ordre entre ceux qui ne se précèdent point naturellement les uns les autres. Et le dernier, de faire partout des dénombrements si entiers, et des revues si générales, que je fusse assuré de ne rien omettre.'

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reduced to its simplest form, and divided up into the smallest possible parts together with an enumeration. (Rule 13)

The whole method consists in the order and arrangement of the things on which the vision of the mind has to be focused in order that we might discover any truth. Yet we shall be following this method exactly if, step by step, we reduce complicated and obscure propositions to simpler ones, and we then try to ascend, through the same steps, from the intuition of the simplest ones of all to a knowledge of all the others. (Rule 5)

For the completion of knowledge, we should survey, in a continuous and completely uninterrupted movement of thought, all the things that relate to our project, together and individually, and we should also summarize them in a sufficient and orderly enumeration. (Rule 7)

and as would be required in order better to resolve them. ('The Rule of Analysis or of Resolution')

The third was to conduct my thoughts in an orderly manner, by beginning with those objects the most simple and the most easy to know, in order to ascend, little by little – as by degrees –, to the knowledge of the most composite ones, and by supposing an order even among those which do not naturally precede one another. ('The Rule of Synthesis or of Composition')

And the last was everywhere to make enumerations so complete and reviews so general that I were assured of omitting nothing. ('The Rule of Enumeration and of Review')

Ironically, the twin phenomena of overlapping and of underlapping also represent the reason why there is no profound conflict between the fact that the *Regulæ* were earlier while the *Discourse* was later, on the one hand, and the fact that the rules of the method of the latter are more rudimentary while those of that of the former are more developed, on the other hand. For the author of the *Regulæ* is ultimately interested in the discovery of a method that *will be* applied in scientific research, whereas the author of the *Discourse* is primarily concerned with the presentation of the method that *has been* applied for scientific results (partially published in the *Essays*).

Therefore the *Discourse* is neither Descartes' first nor his final word on methodology. Rather, it represents a key stage of a development that was occurring before it and that was going to continue after it. Only a synchronic reading of the writing would tempt one to absolutize its statements, whereas a diachronic understanding will encourage one to relativize them. To every text there is a context. Thus the genealogy of 'this method' is not a movement from no method at all to the definitive method, but rather a transition from a vague and obscure anticipation of some rules to the clear and distinct possession of the method. Yet such a striving ceases to be philosophical as soon as those engaged in it believe that the fulfillment of their intentions has achieved final closure. And it would be an uncharitable interpretation to think that Descartes thought otherwise. So Descartes is essentially correct when he states in the *Discourse* that he had been following 'this method' much earlier.[111] For the rules of the *Regulæ* and the method of the *Discourse* are formulated in such a tightly interlocking manner that this claim is easily legitimated.

Thus the movement from the principles of the *Regulæ* to the method of the *Discourse* is a transition from 'the more difficult for us but more facile in itself' to 'the more

[111] Cf., e.g., AT, VI, 19–22, 28–30, etc.

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facile for us but more difficult in itself'. To be sure, these works do present essentially the same method; none the less, they do so by way of overlappingly and underlappingly different rules. Also, there is no comparison between their respective reflections in terms of length, breadth, and depth. As far as philosophical methodology in the rigorous sense is concerned, then, the *Regulæ* enjoy unambiguous primacy over the *Discourse*. Yet the *Discourse* does provide invaluable hints at understanding the *Regulæ* – clues not available elsewhere. So one has to zigzag between these texts in order to get a definite sense of Descartes' method. Finally, one must deny that the *Discourse* contains the definitive account of 'the method', but this is not to assert that the *Regulæ* do so.

In regard to rules, it remains to remark that, while the four rules of the method that are set forth in the second part of the *Discourse* may be 'the principal rules of the method' as laid down there, they are not the only methodological 'rules' that figure prominently in the work. For there is another rule, which is not less important than any of these. Namely, in the fourth part – generalizing from the connection between evidence and truth that he claims for the justification of his dictum 'I think, therefore I am' – Descartes says that '*I judged that I could take for a general rule that the things that we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are all true*'.[112] This is a fateful statement, and Descartes would subsequently spend a lot of time attempting to substantiate it.[113] Indeed, already in the *Discourse* Descartes argues – without claiming to demonstrate or to prove it – that one can be assured of the validity of this rule only because God exists, because he is a perfect being, and because – epistemically – whatever one possesses one obtains from him.[114] Conspicuously, the *Regulæ*, which precede the *Discourse*, do not posit any such human rule of evidence or any such divine guarantee of truth, while the *Meditations*, which follow it, do.

Text and Context II: The 'Regulæ' and the 'Meditations' (1641)[115]

If the *Regulæ* may be regarded as the exemplary text of the early Descartes, then the *Meditations* can be viewed as fulfilling essentially the same function for the mature Descartes. As has already been intimated, the *Meditations on First Philosophy* appear to have originated as 'a little treatise on metaphysics' – focusing on the existence of God and on the immortality of the human soul as the foundations of metaphysics – with which

[112] See ibid., p. 33 (emphasis added): '*… je jugeai que je pouvais prendre pour règle générale, que les choses que nous concevons fort clairement et fort distinctement sont toutes vraies …*'. Cf. ibid., p. 36.

[113] Note that Descartes does not say 'that we clearly and distinctly perceive all the things that we perceive', for there are many things that human beings perceive which they perceive only vaguely and obscurely. Cf., e.g., AT, VI, 37–38, where there is a sharp juxtaposition of 'une assurance morale' and 'une certitude métaphysique'.

[114] See ibid., pp. 38–39: 'For … that which I have already taken for a rule [pour une règle], namely, that the things that we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are all true [que les choses que nous concevons très clairement et très distinctement sont toutes vraies], is assured only because God is or exists, because he is a perfect being, and because all that which is in us comes from him.' In the *Discourse* Descartes chooses not to use terms like 'démontrer' and 'prouver' to describe the force of this argument.

[115] In this section I have, inter alia, adapted and improved some formulations from the Introduction to my earlier edition *René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy: A Monolingual Edition* (Notre Dame, 1992) – cf. ibid., esp. pp. 1–9.

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Descartes was occupied after having moved from France to Holland.[116] For the linkage between the treatise and the *Meditations* is that the fourth part of the *Discourse on the Method* is a report on the contents of the treatise as well as that this part of the *Discourse* is that one between which and the *Meditations* there is the most material and thematic continuity.[117] Indeed, from the autumn of 1639 to the spring of 1640 Descartes was writing a 'Treatise on Metaphysics' or an 'Essay on Metaphysics' which was intended to elucidate this part of the *Discourse* and which gradually approximated less and less the size of that part and more and more that of the *Meditations*.[118] Thus Descartes felt able to claim that he had been working on 'the subject' of the *Meditations* 'all [his] life'.[119]

As is well known, the order of Descartes' reasoned arguments in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, whose purported purpose is just to prove the existence of God as well as to demonstrate the distinction of the human soul from the body,[120] might be arranged in the following manner:

Meditation I argues, among other things, that:[121]

First Premiss:	If even the most basic beliefs can be doubted, then so can virtually all beliefs.
Second Premiss:	But even the most basic beliefs can be doubted.
Conclusion:	Therefore virtually all beliefs can be doubted.

[116] On 'the little treatise on metaphysics' see, once again, Letter to Gibieuf, Jul. 18, 1629 (AT, I, 17), and Letters to Mersenne, Dec. 18, 1629 (ibid., pp. 83–95), Apr. 15 and Nov. 25, 1630 (ibid., pp. 135–147 and 178–182), and Feb. 27, 1637 (ibid., pp. 348–351).

[117] Cf. AT, VI, 1 ('… one will find … , in the fourth [part of the *Discourse*], the arguments by means of which he [Descartes] proves the existence of God and of the human soul, which are the foundations of his [Descartes'] metaphysics …'), and 31–40; AT, VII, 7 ff. (the 'Preface to the Reader' of the *Meditations*); AT, IX/2, 15–16 ('Later on [after the *Discourse* and the *Essays*], foreseeing the difficulty that many would have in conceiving of the foundations of metaphysics, I [Descartes] tried to explain the principal points thereof in a book of *Meditations* …'); and AT, V, 153.

[118] Cf. Letter to Mersenne, Jan. 28, 1641 (AT, III, 297), where Descartes refers to the relationship between the *Discourse* and 'his Metaphysics' ('ma *Métaphysique*'), i.e., the *Meditations*. It is especially striking that midway between the publication of the *Discourse* (1637) and that of the first edition of the *Meditations* (1641) – 'long ready but not yet printed' in the summer of 1640: cf. Letter to Mersenne, Jul. 30, 1640 (AT, III, 126) – Descartes speaks about 'un Discours … de la métaphysique' on which he is working (Letter to Mersenne, Nov. 13, 1639 [AT, II, 622]). Cf. also Letters to Mersenne, Dec. 25, 1639, and Mar. 11, 1640 (AT, II, 629, and III, 39): '… mon Essai de Métaphysique …'. Sometimes Descartes even lapses into the language of a decade earlier, speaking of 'my little Treatise on Metaphysics' ('mon petit Traité de Métaphysique'), i.e., the *Meditations* (Letter to Mersenne, Sept. 30, 1640 [AT, III, 183]). Moreover, Descartes' plan to print 'something on metaphysics' ('quelque chose de métaphysique') and his intention to clarify 'Part Four of the *Method*' ('la quatrième partie de la *Méthode*') were intimately associated (cf. Letter to Huygens, Jul. 31, 1640 [AT, III, 751]). Finally, see AT, V, 153.

[119] See Letter to Mersenne, Oct. 16, 1639 (AT, II, 596): '… un sujet [metaphysics] auquel j'ai travaillé toute ma vie …'.

[120] The more ambitious full title of the first edition (1641) reads: '*Meditations on First Philosophy, in which the Existence of God and the Immortality of the Soul are Demonstrated*'. The less ambitious full title of the second edition (1642) reads: '*Meditations on First Philosophy, in which the Existence of God and the Distinction of the Human Soul from the Body are Demonstrated*'. Yet the basic idea still seems to remain the same, to wit, that, by demonstrating that the human soul is really distinct from the body, one eo ipso demonstrates that the human soul is also immortal (cf. AT, VII, 12–14).

[121] Cf. esp. Synopsis, § 1, Meditation I, §§ 9–12, III, § 4, VI, § 24, etc. Contrary to the impression conveyed in some places, the meditative doubt at issue is not universal, but hyperbolic.

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Meditation II argues, among other things, that:[122]

First Premiss:	If I (am) think(ing), then I am.
Second Premiss:	But I (am) think(ing).
Conclusion:	Therefore I am.

Meditation III argues, among other things, that:[123]

First Premiss:	I exist as an imperfect being.
Second Premiss:	But I have an idea of God as a perfect being.
Conclusion:	Therefore God exists.

It argues, then, that:[124]

First Premiss:	All that which I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true.
Second Premiss:	But the idea of God that I have is that idea which I perceive most clearly and distinctly of all the ideas that I have.
Conclusion:	Therefore the idea of God that I have is the most true idea of all the ideas that I have.

It argues, finally, that:[125]

First Premiss:	God is a perfect being.
Second Premiss:	But deception implies imperfection.
Conclusion:	Therefore God has nothing to do with deception.

Meditation IV argues, among other things, that:[126]

First Premiss:	God is the author of all clear and distinct perceptions.
Second Premiss:	But God is veracious.
Conclusion:	Therefore every clear and distinct perception is veridical.

[122] Cf. Meditation II, §§ 3 and 6, III, § 9, IV, § 10, etc. Of course, the concise, precise formulation, 'cogito, ergo sum', does not occur in the *Meditations*. But see *Discourse*, AT, VI, 32–33, and *Principia philosophiae*, AT, VIII/1, 7–8.

[123] Cf. the enthymematic formulation of the first argument for the existence of God in Meditation III, § 36, as well as III, § 38, and IV, § 1. Here the second premiss vastly underestimates the problem of whether an imperfect being can have an accurate and adequate idea of a perfect being.

[124] Cf. Meditation III, §§ 2 and 25. Here the second premiss may be even harder to accept than the first. For there is much that speaks for the vagueness and obscurity of human beings' ideas of God.

[125] Cf. Meditation III, § 38, and IV, § 2. Here the second premiss lapses into moralizing. According to the account of the fall in *Genesis*, chs. 2–3, to doubt the divine veracity is to violate one of the basic tenets of Judaeo-Christianity. For the first human beings of the *Bible* were given two conflicting accounts of what would happen to them if they were to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree, namely, that of their maker, that is, that they would die, and that of their tempter, that is, that they would become divine. For some reason, they both preferred to believe, and chose to act on, the latter. Therefore, even before they did anything against the will of God, they had already fallen. Thus there is a big difference between the fall and the primordial sin of the first human beings. They would not have violated the promulgated will of God in their actions if they had not already withdrawn their trust in his word. Of course, Descartes steadfastly refuses even to meditate seriously against the Judaeo-Christian God.

[126] Cf. Meditation IV, § 17. In lieu of a cogent argument for the divine veracity posited by the second premiss, this argument remains wobbly. Yet one way to make sense of the first premiss – at least from the perspective of Judaeo-Christianity – is to look at it in this way: God is the creator of all creatures. Some creatures are human beings. Human beings are created with cognitive faculties. The application or operation of these faculties results in perceptions. Some of these perceptions are clear and distinct. Therefore God is the – indirect, mediate, and ultimate – author of these perceptions. *On the other hand*, if God is the author of all perceptions, then he is the author, not only of those that are clear and distinct, but also of those that are vague and obscure. In the final analysis, then, even Descartes is forced to restrict the scope of his claims about the veracity of God – which he admits (cf. Meditation VI, §§ 18–23).

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Meditation V argues, among other things, that:[127]

First Premiss:	The essence of God is to possess all perfections.
Second Premiss:	But existence is a perfection.
Conclusion:	Therefore God exists.

Meditation VI argues, among other things, that:[128]

First Premiss:	The teaching of nature informs me that the ideas of sensible things in me come from sensible things outside me.
Second Premiss:	But God, the source of the teaching of nature, is not a deceiver.
Conclusion:	Therefore corporeal things exist.

Due to the constraints of this context, each argument has been presented in its short form. Even so, they enjoy immunity from banalization.

Now there are the arguments of the parts, and there is the argument of the whole. Ironically, it directly concerns, neither the existence of God nor the real distinction of the human soul from the body, but what must be called 'the general rule of truth'. For in the *Meditations* Descartes frankly announces that he intends 'to prove'[129] or 'to demonstrate'[130] the validity of 'a general rule',[131] to wit, of 'the rule of truth',[132] namely, that 'whatever is (very) clearly and (very) distinctly perceived must necessarily be true and cannot possibly be false'.[133] Thus the task is to certify that genuine evidence yields knowledge – or to legitimate the ideal of absolute, adequate, and apodictic knowledge by ascertaining its reality.[134]

Indeed, Descartes is very careful about exactly when, where, and how he substantiates 'the general rule of truth'. For instance, at the beginning of Meditation III he is aware that he is justified in saying only that 'I now *seem to be able* to establish as a general rule that all that which I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true'[135] – since at this point he has not yet demonstrated it.[136] However, this does not prevent him from

[127] Cf. Meditation V, §§ 7–12. The difficulty besetting the second premiss is well known.

[128] Cf. Meditation VI, § 10, i.e., the argument for the existence of the external world. Note the big difference between Descartes' justification of the veracity of very clear and distinct perceptions and his explanation of the reliability of ideas of sensible things. The former appeals to the natural light (*lumen naturale*) of reason, whereas the latter refers to the teaching of nature (*doctrina naturae*) via impulses. The crucial shift of focus from the one aspect of human knowledge to the other occurs in Meditation VI, § 10 ff.

[129] See Synopsis, §§ 2 and 4 ('probare').

[130] See Synopsis, § 2, and Meditation V, § 6 ('demonstrare').

[131] See Meditation III, § 2 ('regula generalis'). [132] See Meditation V, § 15 ('regula veritatis').

[133] See Synopsis, §§ 2 and 4, Meditation I, §§ 9–12, II, §§ 3 and 6, III, §§ 2, 4, 9, 16, 25, and 38, IV, §§ 1–2, 10, 12, and 15–17, V, §§ 6–7 and 11–15, VI, §§ 6–7, 9–10, 11–16, and 23–24, etc.

[134] But, of course, not in all cases whatsoever. Once again, there is a significant difference between the things that human beings can perceive (very) clearly and distinctly and the things that they cannot. In the *Meditations* the evidence of 'clarity and distinctness' pertains, properly speaking, not to 'the teaching of nature' (*doctrina naturalis*) – which can and often does involve uncomfortably high levels of vagueness and obscurity –, but to 'the natural light' (*lumen naturale*). Descartes understands the latter as the realm of infallibility pertaining to the thinking thing and the former as the area of fallibility pertaining to the thinking and extended composite. Cf., e.g., III, §§ 8–12, and VI, §§ 10–24.

[135] See III, § 2 (emphasis added): '… ac proinde iam *videor* pro regula generali *posse* statuere, illud omne esse verum, quod valde clare et distincte percipio.'

[136] See Synopsis, § 2, where Descartes says that 'before the Fourth Meditation' he was 'unable to prove' that 'all the things that we clearly and distinctly understand are true in that manner in which we understand them'.

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